

VZCZCXR09410

PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSR

DE RUEHW #0397 1041433

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 141433Z APR 09

FM AMEMBASSY WARSAW

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8167

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L WARSAW 000397

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/08/2019

TAGS: ELAB PGOV PL

SUBJECT: POLISH SOLIDARITY UNION BLASTS GOP "NEOLIBERAL" POLICIES

Classified By: Ambassador Victor Ashe, Reason 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) Janusz Sniadek, President of Solidarity Trade Union, told the Ambassador April 8 that Poland is only starting to feel the effects of the global financial crisis, but said the GoP should prepare for the worst case. The government is doing virtually nothing, he argued, to mitigate the effects of the downturn, other than public relations activities. The current "neo-liberal" government is determined not to add to government deficits, and has begun a worrisome process of devolving health and education responsibilities to local governments without corresponding funding. Sniadek cited Tusk's recent comments at the anti-crisis summit hosted by President Kaczynski about the inefficiency of other countries' stimulus programs. In Sniadek's view, however, elements of President Obama's stimulus package could be useful models for Poland.

¶2. (C) Sniadek acknowledged that a majority of his union's members probably support the largest opposition party, Law and Justice (PiS), but he is determined not to repeat the disastrous experience of affiliating the union with a political party. (In the 1990s, Solidarity backed the center-right government led by the Solidarity Electoral Alliance, AWS.) In any event, he was unable to identify a major political party that supported his trade union's objectives. According to Sniadek, the ruling Civic Platform (PO) is not even trying to help workers; PiS continues to focus on "chasing bad guys," even in the opposition; and the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) is not a real party of the left. He said Solidarity has better ties with European Social Democrats than SLD, and he condemned the willingness of SLD parliamentary club chairman Wojciech Olejnicak to barter away the early retirement benefits of workers in some sectors when he negotiated a deal with the PO.

¶3. (C) Out of frustration with the government's lack of action on the anti-crisis front, workers and employers are teaming up, according to Sniadek. The government has not responded to a March 13 package of anti-crisis measures suggested by a committee of workers and employers; if the government continues to be silent, the committee will go public with its criticism around the end of next week. Sniadek lamented that many workers became interested in organizing when it was too late, and their factories were already closing. However, he noted that union members had already engaged in demonstrations in some sectors -- particularly the defense sector -- and warned that if a significant number of teachers are laid off in the fall, there will likely be major protests.

¶4. (C) Comment. Sniadek's pessimism contrasts starkly with recent comments we have heard from business and government leaders, who tell us the "Tripartite Commission" of government, workers, and employers is working productively to agree on legislation to protect jobs and workers. End Comment.

ASHE